



# Garbage Sandwich to Healthy Habitat

## Estuary Lost

Every piece of the earth tells a story. Glaciers, rivers and tides once shaped the place where you stand. Whatcom Creek met the tide of Bellingham Bay forming the horseshoe shape outlined today by the ancient sea cliff to your right, below the Whatcom Museum. If you had been here 150 years ago, you would have been swimming in the estuary along with young salmon.



Photo by E.A. Hegg



## Landfill Layers

As the city grew, people filled the estuary with layers of garbage and ocean floor dredging. Landfill drastically reduced the estuary and the valuable habitat it once provided for salmon and sea life. Glass, metal scraps, wood chips and construction debris filled 30 vertical feet transforming 13 acres of estuary into landfill. Today, at Maritime Heritage Park, you stand on top of that garbage sandwich. The remnant estuary hides below.

## Garbage Gas

Garbage smells when it rots. Did you know that rotting garbage creates gas? Organic waste produces methane gas as it decays. Methane is a dangerous, explosive gas. Before this building was constructed, an elaborate system was built to collect the methane produced below the building. The gas is trapped, collected and piped to the white barrels to your left, where it is absorbed by a carbon scrubber.

## Estuary Restored

Metals in the garbage combined with tidal saltwater to create contaminated sea soup in the estuary. Today 12,000 tons of contaminated soil are gone, covered with clean fill and replaced with expanded salt marsh habitat. A boardwalk separates human impact from improved habitat. Changing tides continue to ebb and flow, enhancing the estuary home for salmon and sea life.

Imagine an estuary no longer filled with garbage and contaminated soil. Today we can reuse, recycle and reduce our impacts on water quality. Next time you consider using the garbage can, remember to recycle metal and glass, reuse what you can, and choose to keep our air and water clean for people and wildlife.



**PUGET SOUND  
ACTION TEAM**

*Office of the Governor*

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Photos courtesy of Whatcom Museum of History and Art

